



SPIRITUAL AFFIRMATION: I give my thanks to
Creation and Creation showers me with goodness

Week 1: Autumn

>> Lesson 1: Thanksgiving Address or “Words before all else”

Spiritual Affirmation: I give my thanks to Creation and Creation showers me with goodness.

Getting to the Heart of the Lesson

A Joyful Path, Year 3 has been developed with a focus that explores the interdependence of all things. Each lesson provides spiritual tools and practices to remind us we cannot separate ourselves from Earth, Her creatures, the elements, or one another. Our attempts to live “independently” creates the separation that leads to suffering, division and destruction, all of which runs counter to the sacred teachings present in all the World Religions, Earth-centered spiritualities, and Indigenous ways of life.

We encourage you to begin each week with some moments of mindfully noticing where you are geographically and ecologically located with respect and curiosity. A simple way to do this is with a Land Acknowledgment ⁽¹⁾ that acknowledges and gives thanks for those who were living on the land before it was settled or colonized, and then by inviting everyone present to share something for which they feel grateful. There are more suggestions below, beneath the “Gratitude Circle” header, to help you think about how to offer a Land Acknowledgement and create a Gratitude Circle with the children to begin the lesson each time you meet.

In this first lesson, A Joyful Path begins by honoring our Native Teachers and receiving their wisdom for how to live a healthy, connected life with Spirit on Earth. Throughout the year, Indigenous teachings will be included wherever possible. Teachings of many other beings (human and more-than-human) who have long been marginalized by dominant culture and the views of religions expressed too narrowly will also be included.

Feeling grateful helps us to know that we are an important part of Creation. When we express our gratitude, we feel better about ourselves, and more connected to others and the world around us.

Teacher Reflection/Activity

Some reading and a 10-20 min exercise (more if you have time and wish to take it) so you are able to experience the teachings offered through this lesson.)

The Thanksgiving Address or Words Before All Else, is a practice of the Haudenosunee (Haw-di-naw-SHOW-knee) People, a collection of First Nations tribes, whose home reaches from Michigan, to upstate New York and Canada.

The Thanksgiving Address is the first thing that happens anytime the people gather for council (meetings) or ceremony (celebrations). It is a time to speak gratitude to all that exists and supports our existence on Earth. Native teachers are clear to say the address is not a prayer but rather the practice that brings us into the space where we can pray or do other sacred work (i.e., resolve conflicts, make important decisions, be present for difficult conversations) with a clear mind, a clear heart, and greater connectivity with self, one another, all Creation and the Source of all Creation.

There are many studies today about the importance of gratitude. Neuroscientists, spiritual teachers and psychologists agree with the ancient wisdom that connecting with our gratitude is good for us – mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally.

For your nourishment and meditation this week, please consider one of the following:

Option One — Read aloud, this fairly traditional version of the Thanksgiving Address. (<https://www.10000loveletters.org/the-thanksgiving-address>)

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Reflect: Are there lines you would add to include more things for which you feel grateful? How would the meetings or other gatherings you attend feel if, before anything else on the agenda, all participants brought “their minds together as one”?

Option Two — Start a Gratitude Journal (or Gratitude Wall, using sticky notes) for you, those with whom you live, or others who visit your home. Much like a guest book, this journal or wall should be in a visible place. Write down what you feel grateful for and encourage others to do the same. Read the entries on days that feel difficult or stressful, or when you are feeling separate and alone.

Reflect: What is it like to surround yourself with these visual reminders? What if, before doing anything that requires your focus, you felt connected to gratitude? Experiment with this in the coming days and months.

Read through the lesson before your time with the children. Decide which Activity Exploration will work best for your class (There are usually two options; choose one.). Just below the heading, “Children’s Lesson and Story” you will find the preparations checklist for this lesson so you can collect any needed materials or make arrangements to support your selected activity.

Sacred Text Quotes

Christian Scriptures. Colossians 4:2 (NRSV)

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.

Hebrew Scriptures. Psalm 79:15 (NRSV)

Then we, your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

African Traditions (Nigeria), Yoruba Proverb

One upon whom we bestow kindness but will not express gratitude, is worse than a robber who carries away our belongings.

Wisdom Quotes

Gratitude is not about stuff. Gratitude is the emotional response to the surprise of our very existence, to sensing that inner light and realizing the astonishing sacred, social, and scientific events that brought each one of us into being. We cry out like the psalmist, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made!” (Psalm 139:14).

— *Rev. Diana Butler Bass, Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was “thank you” that would suffice.

— *Meister Eckhart*

Wear gratitude like a cloak and it will feed every corner of your life.

— *Rumi*

Gratitude begins in our hearts and then dovetails into behavior. It almost always makes you willing to be of service, which is where the joy resides. It means that you are willing to stop being such a jerk. When you are aware of all that has been given to you, in your lifetime and the past few days, it is hard not to be humbled, and pleased to give back.

— *Anne Lamott*

Preparation for Teaching

Choose ONE of the Exploration Activities below. Then prepare for that activity, as needed, with the instructions here.

☐ (Opening the Lesson) Take a few minutes to research who were the original caretakers (Native nation) of the land you are on. Here is a quick guide: <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/06/24/323665644/the-map-of-native-american-tribes-youve-never-seen-before>

☐ (Opening the Lesson) This link offers simple instructions on how to acknowledge and honor native land, A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement:

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<https://usdac.us/nativeland>. Download a poster at this link and print it to display in your classroom. Bring it to class and, together with the children, fill in the names of the Indigenous people on whose land you now reside.

☐ (Opening the Lesson) If you do not know, look up the name of the watershed that supports the area where your gatherings take place.

☐ (Opening the Lesson) Print the Thanksgiving Address poster below, OR find the book at your library/buy it from the publisher, OR have the Youtube video (below) cued, ready to view.

☐ (Activities) If you have not done so already, this would be the time to gather your Teacher's Supply Box to have ready for this and all future lessons. See the “Introductions and Instructions for Teachers” section in this handbook for the check list.

☐ (Activity One) A tablecloth or scarf to create an altar on a small table (a covered box can also work well). Other items for the altar could include candlesticks and candles, images, sacred objects such as figurines, natural items such as water, flowers, incense, stones, crystals, shells, etc. See the “Introductions and Instructions for Teachers” section in this handbook for further information on creating an altar.

☐ (Activity Two) Butcher block of paper for wall mural, along with markers. If you want to create a wall mural using magazine images, collect magazines for this and bring tape or glue sticks.

☐ Select one Sacred Text or Wisdom Quote from the collection above that, with some help from you, the children will understand. Write or print your selection on paper or a dry erase/chalkboard so the quote can be read during the session. (Note: Some of the Wisdom Quotes are intended for

teachers and will be too difficult for the childrens' comprehension.)

☐ Prepare the Affirmation page for children to take home at the end of your time together. You can print out the full page Spiritual Affirmation art from the digital file or make copies from your handbook.



Music option: When children are entering cleaning up or as a movement break: Soar Like an Eagle, by Jen Rose

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2vXacHmM04mOIJgJL15oso?si=9d5b422eb53a47ce>

Opening the Lesson

Begin by asking the children to share what they know about where you live -- *Do you know the name of the people who, long before you arrived, called this land home?* (If not, tell them.)

Share the map and/or other photos you printed/saved from your research. *Do you know the name of the watershed that brings fresh water to the faucets where you are right now?* (If not, tell them.) Talk about where the water begins. *How far a drive is that? Has anyone been there before?* Etc.

Introduce the Haudenosaunee (Haw-di-naw-SHOW-knee) Address by explaining it is a tradition begun by a collection of Native Peoples who believed it was very important to express gratitude each day and every time they gathered together. *What is gratitude?* (Make sure everyone understands the word.) *Why is it good for us to feel grateful?*

Next, read or listen to the Thanksgiving Address:

Here are a few options:

1. Beautiful language & illustrations in this book for children created by Chief Jake Swamp,

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teacher & author, now an ancestor.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HJFeHK5L3I>)

2. Video of Indigenous youth, asking an indigenous elder to talk about this practice.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swJs2cGNwIU>)
3. Look up “Thanksgiving Address” online and find print-able versions there from the National Museum of the American Indian.

new life and babies? Yes, we are grateful! What about you, Jana? Ah-ha! Is anyone else grateful for soccer, or running and sports? Yes, we are grateful! Etc)

Ask the students to identify where, in their bodies, they feel gratitude (happiness in the heart, warmth in the tummy, dance-y in the feet & legs, calmer all over, etc.). Again, anything the children feel grateful for is ok. There are no wrong answers.

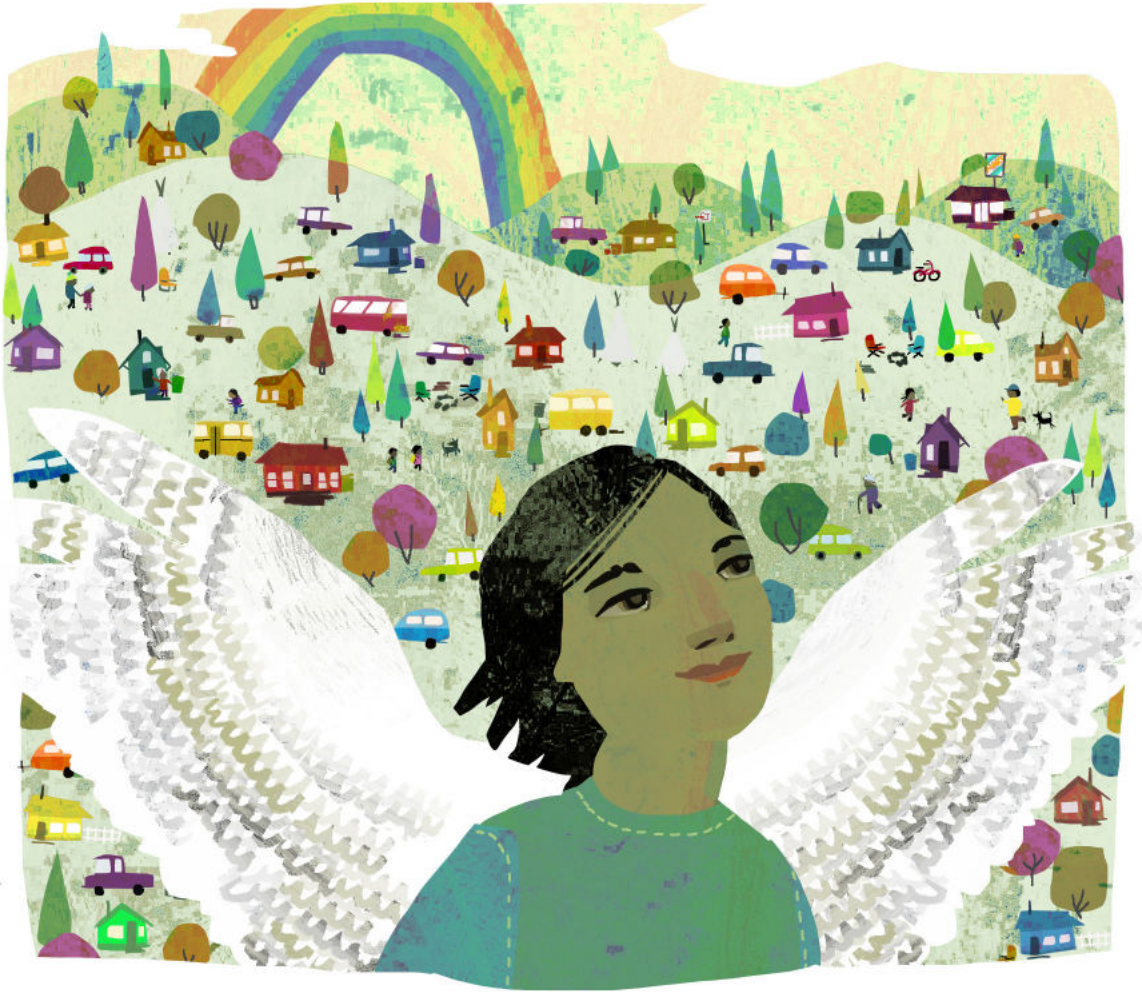
After reading or listening to the Thanksgiving Address aloud, ask: *What did you notice about the Thanksgiving Address? What does the phrase “and now our minds are one” mean? Isn’t it interesting that when one person shares their gratitude for the sun, or trees that we often realize we’re feeling grateful for those things too? When we share our gratitude, our gratitude grows and we celebrate being a community together. Just like the Native people, everytime we are together this year, we are going to begin with a Gratitude Circle. Let’s try one now.*

Gratitude Circle (standing if possible)

We encourage you to begin each week with some moments of mindfully noticing where you are geographically and ecologically located with respect and curiosity. A simple way to do this is to acknowledge and give thanks for those who were living on the land before it was settled or colonized, and then by inviting everyone present to share something for which they feel grateful.

Additional ways to honor your surroundings include: *Do you know the name of the people who, long before you arrived, called this land home? Do you know the name of the watershed that brings fresh water to the faucets where you are right now? What season are we in? What is Earth doing now? What did you see today or this week that let you know what season we’re in or what Earth seems busy doing?*

Let’s go around the circle now. Share something you feel grateful for today. (Carter said he is grateful for his new baby cousin. Are any of the rest of you grateful for



STORY: Wambleeska, Part 1 ⁽²⁾
“Wambleeska and His Gratitude”

Age 11
Sioux Oglala Lakota Tribe
Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota

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TEXTS and QUOTES: Before reading the story for the lesson, invite a volunteer to read the Sacred Text and/or Wisdom Quote you have selected. Ask the children for their ideas about what these words might mean. Then proceed to the story...

I was born, 11 years ago, in South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Reservation and I am a member of the Sioux Oglala Lakota Tribe. My name is Wambleeska, which means White Eagle in Lakota, but people call me John.” I often wonder if the name my Mother gave me is why I dream of flying high above the pine trees, the world small below me - to have the Eagle’s eye, to dance in the sky, and to soar above the clouds.

Pine Ridge Reservation is located 75 miles southeast of the Black Hills in South Dakota. We can see the Black Hills from our land. The Black Hills used to be a part of our land, but there were a series of broken promises in the last 200 years that left our tribe on a very small portion of our sacred land. We were promised this land by the white settlers. Those promises were all broken. Our sacred lands were stolen from us and we were left with very little.

Yesterday, I was walking up to the top of the hill that is on our Reservation. An Indian Reservation is land set aside for Native Americans by the United States government. It was a cold and windy day. The grasses that covered the hill were moving in unison as if they were dancing, swaying to silent music. There were still some wildflowers dotting the lands with color and spirit at this time of year. Our horizon is shaped by the sharp ridges of the mountains. We have the most beautiful sunsets and sunrises. The rainbows here arch across the entire sky in a full half circle.

I reached the top of the hill and surveyed the land below me. I took a deep breath, noticing the change in smells as the season was shifting. I saw a hawk high above me and I heard his screech, his white belly and yellow feet visible to me from far below. The sky was big and open and wide before me.

I pulled out my notebook, math study book, and pencil. I love learning math. Everyday I try to find a quiet space to study. I want to be the first person in my family to go to college. I want to be the first Native American President.

But yesterday my mind wandered and it was hard to concentrate. I felt sad and angry looking down at the land and our Reservation. How can people who came from such powerful warriors and wise elders have gotten this poor? I want to yell at the white settlers and the government that did this to us, “This is your fault!” But most of those people are long gone.

Below me there is a road that cuts through the land. The houses on the road aren’t nice. They are simple and many are breaking down. There are trailers and some teepees. From this hilltop, I can see the area where we have our sweat lodges and a nearby open fire pit. There are broken windows and steps. There is trash laying around. Graffiti covers many of the houses and trailers. There is mold everywhere. Most of the houses don’t have electricity. Many of the driveways are filled with broken and busted cars. There is junk in the yards. Many people are just hanging around, not doing much.

When adults are struggling to survive, we kids can feel forgotten. But children need to be seen. We need our elders guiding us and loving us. I don’t see my mother often because she isn’t taking care of herself and she can’t take care of me.

Many people who live here do not have jobs and way too many of my people, like my mother, turn to alcohol. We are very poor here. I live in a trailer with my grandmother, my uncle and eight cousins. The ceiling of our trailer is leaking. My clothes were wet this morning from the leaks of rain through the roof. I am just so happy to be with my grandmother because she takes care of me and my cousins. Not everyone is as lucky as me to have someone who loves me and provides a home for me.

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But the land here is beautiful and there is hope for our tribe. Our generation is going to change things. The famous Native Americans, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse are my relatives. Crazy Horse is known to have said: “Upon suffering, beyond suffering: the Red Nation shall rise again and it shall be a blessing for a sick world; a world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations; a world longing for light again. I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the Whole Earth will become one circle again.”

Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull fought for us kids. Crazy Horse said our people will rise again and become a blessing for a sick world. I think it is kids today who are going to do that. We are going to rise up and show our people a better way.

We need to remember where we come from. I want to be a part of that remembering. I want to build community gardens so we can eat healthy foods like our people used to eat. I want to learn about business, how to manage money, how to write, how to cook, and how to build. I am learning the cultural dances of my people. Learning a dance might not seem important to you but it is sacred to me. Everything is sacred – the sage, the sweetgrass, the dancing, the buffalo, the horses, and the water.

Our Creator, The Great Mystery, gives us everything that we need – the laws, the language, the values, and the ceremonies – in order to live in balance and be good relatives, not only with each other, but with all of creation.

There has been a return to learning our original language, culture and ceremonies.

My uncle tells me, “There will be a muddy road and an easy road. The rich will take the easy road and the poor will take the muddy road and they will get stronger because of it. Always remember you are Lakota first. We might not be rich in material things but we are rich in our culture and our love for each other.”

Even though things are hard, I am so thankful. So yesterday, when I was feeling overwhelmed with sadness, I found my gratitude. I stood up, reached my arms out like an eagle’s wings, and closed my eyes, pretending I was soaring through the sky. The wind gently pushed up against my chest and pushed back my hair. Someday this land will be returned to my people. I can feel it in my bones. And just like Crazy Horse said, we can be the ones who bring all the colors of humankind together in a circle under the Sacred Tree.

With my eyes still closed, I said thank you to Creator... for the rain, for the land, for the sweetgrass, for the songs and dances of my people, for my Grandmother, my Uncle and my cousins. I said thank you that I was alive another day. I said thank you to the animals, our relatives, who taught us how to live on these lands. I said thank you that the Buffalo and the wild horses are returning. I said thank you that I can go to school to learn. I said thank you to the trees that clean our air and teach us about strong roots. I said thank you for my teacher who tells me everyday to believe in my dreams: I can be President of the United States. If I keep working hard, I can be the first Native American President.

Concentrating on math was easier after that. After my mind was reconnected with my heart. I easily finished my homework, enjoying the challenge of the tough math problems. I felt smart and strong. And I knew I would do all I can to help my people.

I looked to the east and saw the tall teepee where I knew my friends and family were protesting and praying, hoping to get our land back. I packed up my backpack and flew down the hill, like an eagle, to join them.

Being Lakota carries with it a lot of hurt and pain and a history of being mistreated. But we are proud of who we are. I am proud to be Lakota. I am not afraid to speak up to change what is happening. We are letting the world know we are still here. We have overcome so much. I want to leave a legacy that goes on beyond my life! We have our

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challenges but we are lifting ourselves up.

Discussion Questions

(select a few)

1. *Is it hard for you to imagine life on a reservation like Pine Ridge where people are very poor and most people do not have jobs? How is that different from the neighborhood, city, or town where you live?*
2. *Even though Wamleeska's life is hard, he seems to be so strong and thankful. How do you think he stays connected to his gratitude?*
3. *Do you know the history of your great great great grandparents and where they came from? Would you like to learn?*
4. *For what part of nature do you feel thankful? Why?*
5. *We started today with a gratitude circle. Now that you have heard the story, why do you think that is important?*
6. *Now that we have heard the story for this lesson, let's return to the Sacred Text and/or Wisdom Quote we heard a few minutes ago. Why are these words important? What do you think we should remember?*

Activity/Exploration 1

Altar of Thanksgiving & Beauty — If conditions allow, explore the property outside or go for a short walk in the neighborhood. Bring back small items and add them to the elements you brought to create a gratitude-themed altar. If going outdoors isn't possible, encourage the children to walk around the room/space and choose an item to place on the altar. If possible, leave the altar set up for continued use throughout the year. You will be invited to clear and create a new altar when the season changes.

IV. Activity/Exploration 2

Gratitude Mural — Using butcher block paper taped to the wall, create a mural by writing words/

sentences, drawing images of what the class feels grateful for, or using images from magazines. Anything for which the kids are thankful is welcome.

Closing the Lesson

Summarize: One of the most powerful prayers we can pray is “Thank you.” Spiritual teachings remind us of how important it is for us to express our thanks. When we express our gratitude, we usually feel better about ourselves, more connected with others and the world around us. Anytime we are feeling grateful for something or someone, it is good to say it (even quietly to ourselves). And, if we are having a hard time or a bad day,, it is good to remember or think about what we feel thankful for. When we feel grateful, we open ourselves up to God's love and more creativity in the moment.

Hand out the Spiritual Affirmation Page if you have printed it or open the book to that page. Read the Spiritual Affirmation out loud to the children, then have everyone repeat it together, three times... joyfully!

Spiritual Affirmation for the Week:

I give my thanks to Creation and Creation showers me with goodness.

Next Time:

We have a special time planned next week. It is one of the four times this year when we will do nature-crafting. We will learn more about it next time, but at each nature-craft week, we will be celebrating one of the four seasons and preparing for a ritual ceremony that honors that season. What season do you suppose we will be celebrating at this time of year? See you next time!

Footnotes:

⁽¹⁾ *Land Acknowledgment “Acknowledgement is a simple, powerful way of showing respect and a step toward correcting the stories and practices that erase Indigenous people's history and culture and toward inviting and honoring the truth.” - US Department of Arts and*

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Culture, <https://usdac.us/nativeland>

(2) Inspired by these stories: 2018 on ABC, “Hidden America: Children of the Plains”

<https://youtu.be/IJapHc7B8Xs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie4m9LAVDGw>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/pictureshow/2012/08/13/158560051/slideshow-the-light-and-dark-on-pine-ridge-reservation>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/sep/29/pine-ridge-indian-reservation-south-dakota>